DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 249 313 UD 023 818

AUTHOR Scott, Hugh J.
TITLE Some Assumptions about School Desegregation and the Education of Black Americans.
PUB DATE Sep 84
NOTE 7p.; Statement presented to participants at the Brown Plus Thirty Conference, Metropolitan Center for Education Research, Development and Training, New York University (New York, NY, September 12-14, 1984).
PUB TYPE Reports - General (140) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Black Students; Desegregation Effects; *Educational Improvement; Elementary Secondary Education; *Equal Education; Policy Formation; *Public Policy; Racial Balance; Racial Integration; Racial Relations; *School Desegregation; Urban Schools

ABSTRACT

Considerable disagreement remains between white and black Americans as to what are permissible and effective policies for the desegregation of public education. Research findings exist to support almost every point of view, and desegregation strategies tend to reflect the social beliefs and educational assumptions of those in power. Efforts made so far have produced neither genuine racial desegregation nor the extension of equal educational opportunity to the majority of black students. In other words, the social and educational benefits to be gained by white and black students from equitable desegregation have not yet been realized. Racial balance remedies, for instance, clearly have not succeeded in creating desegregated schools; they have, instead, engendered white flight, which in turn has led to predominantly black urban school systems. As a result, the preeminent challenge confronting school desegregation today is that of making black schools more effective rather than less non-white. Blacks would prefer not to be redesegregated, especially if it means more disruptions and dislocations with little or no attention to improving the educational lot of black children. Future policy should proclaim that school desegregation strategies must respect cultural identity, provide for equitable implementation, and address educational inequalities. (KH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED249313

SOME ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT SCHOOL DESEGREGATION AND THE EDUCATION OF BLACK AMERICANS

UD 023818

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Hugh J. Scott
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

9.21.84

SOME ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT SCHOOL DESEGREGATION AND THE EDUCATION OF BLACK AMERICANS*

Hugh J. Scott, Dean
Programs in Education
Hunter College of C.U.N.Y.
September 1984

There remains considerable disagreement between white and black Americans and even among black Americans as to what are the permissible and effective policies and practices in the desegregation of public education. The courts recognize that there is no universal (fail safe) answer to the complexities of school desegregation. The data bank on school desegregation is extensive, complex, and often contradictory. Research findings on the very sensitive and highly important topic of the effects of school desegregation on the academic achievement of white and black students tend to have something to support almost every point of view. There are no agnostics in school desegregation. School desegregation strategies are derived from the pervasive social beliefs and principal educational assumptions and priorities of those who exercise power in the determination of the permissible policies and practices.

Three decades of school desegregation have produced neither genuine racial desegregation of public education nor the extension of equal educational opportunity to the majority of black students in America. School desegregation has not been characterized by educational changes that truly make it possible for both black and white students to express the similarity and uniqueness of their personal and group life in an institution that belongs to all Americans. Black Americans did not challenge the constitutionality of "de jure" racially segregated public schools because they believed that black schools by the very nature of their "blackness" were inferior and incapable of teaching black students how to read and write. Black Americans challenged the constitutionality of "de jure" racial segregation in public education because racial segregation was founded on the premise of white superiority and black inferiority and because the "separate but unequal" schools denied black Americans the fundamental right of equal protection under the law.

There are potential social and educational benefits to be gained by white and black students from an equitable desegregation of the public schools. Intelligently conceived and equitably implemented school desegregation strategies remain an imperative in American education. The reassignment of black students from all or mainly black schools, whether or not the reassignment required busing, has been and still remains an effective desegregation strategy in some school districts. The belief that a racially integrated, effective school for all students in a pluralistic society is the best model for a public school should not be misconstrued to mean that

ED 033 818

* Statement presented to participants at the "Brown Plus Thirty" Conference sponsored by the Metropolitan Center for Education Research, Development & Training of New York University held in New York City from September 12-14, 1984 in conjunction with the author's role as consultant for the discussion group assigned the topic: The Social Perspective of School Desegregation.

this model is the only acceptable model or that the presence of predominantly or all black schools necessarily represents an infringement of a constitutional right of black students.

Sufficient school desegregation history exists to indicate that the path to equal educational opportunity and a quality education for most black students is not via the outworn and inefficacious overreliance on racial balance remedies. Racial balance remedies in response to Brown were never intended to make improvement in the academic performance of black students a major goal. It is time to stop maximizing the minimum in school desegregation. The juxtaposition of numbers as opposed to focusing on the improvement of the quality of education regardless where black children go to school must be ended as a desegregation strategy acceptable to the courts, attorneys for plaintiffs, civil rights organizations and parents. This challenge to the unrealistic and nonproductive preoccupation with numerically determined educational equity is part of the inevitable debate in the school desegregation arena as to the appropriateness of various ways and means of achieving compliance with the mandates of Brown. The fault lies not with Brown but with implementing Brown in a manner that virtually guarantees that any attention given to educational quality for black students comes not as a consequence of the desegregation strategy.

More black students now attend schools identified as racially isolated under "de facto" segregated practices than attended segregated schools under "de jure" segregated practices. The majority of black students now live in the large urban centers and attend schools that are predominantly minority. The preeminent challenge confronting school desegregation is that of making Brown an instrument for making mainly minority schools more effective rather than less non-white. Black Americans ought not tolerate ineffective, inequitable, and obsolete desegregation strategies out of fear that to challenge them would give aid and comfort to those who believe in the separation of the races or who would turn back decades of progress in civil rights. Desegregation efforts that allegedly seek to contribute to the process of black Americans securing the blessings and privileges of first-class citizenship cannot succeed if they impose, even temporarily, second-class status on blacks as a means to this end. Blackness is neither greater nor less than whiteness. What black Americans are prepared to accept and reject in terms of the permissible policies and practices in school desegregation will provide key indicators of just how deeply rooted in black America are the roots of black pride and consciousness.

White flight created the large, predominantly black urban school systems. Today, blacks would prefer not to be redesegregated, especially if it means more disruptions and dislocations with little or no attention to efforts to improve the educational lot of black children. Barring major changes in state laws that govern the prerogatives of states boards of education and a significant reduction in housing discrimination that is coupled with impressive improvements in the economic well-being of most black Americans, school desegregation will not erase the reality that quality education for the vast number of black students will be achieved only when there is effective schooling in mainly black schools and school systems.

The charge of social inequity and educational inconsequentiality against racial balance remedies is not a preamble for a rejection of Brown to a return to the doctrine of "separate but equal" but with full funding support. There is an urgent need for a Brown III. Brown III would proclaim that school desegregation strategies must respect cultural identity, provide for equitable implementation, and address educational inequalities. For those whose decisions shape the permissible policies and practices in school desegregation, I urge consideration of the following assumptions:

Cultural

There is no "mainstream" culture in America; and the "melting pot" ideal falsely implies that there is a consensus culture, a way of life which all Americans can learn to subscribe to and live by.

People have a right to their cultural past and to the freedom and privileges that are enjoyed by those in the more dominant streams of our total society.

Black Americans share values, behavioral patterns, and other cultural elements that spring from the black experience and which distinguish blacks from others in the larger population.

Being a "good American" does not require that black Americans forfeit their cultural heritage or become facsimiles of white Americans.

It is not undemocratic, nor a violation of equal protection of the law, to have a system of education that allows for recognition of and respect for differences in our society.

A rigid adherence to racial ratios in school desegregation premised upon the goal of assimilation or racial balance is not required constitutionally and is socially undesirable.

Schools should respect and preserve the integrity and worth of ethnic and racial identity and contribution while simultaneously promoting the presence and vitality of a broadly heterogeneous population which can truly respond as a nation in an acceptance of and allegiance to the fundamental tenets of the American democracy.

Black Consciousness

In the struggle to become a more viable, functioning group in a society in which power and influence are the guardians of life, liberty, and happiness, black Americans must be keenly aware of their common history and their common predicament as black people.

Black consciousness, as it is projected in concert with the basic tenets of American democracy, is a logical and legitimate form of social behavior.

The black experience has conditioned black Americans to approach with considerable caution and apprehension proposals championed by white Americans which purport to bear benefits for black Americans.

Black Americans require educators--black and white--to demonstrate an identification with black-directed endeavors to resolve the problems and needs of black Americans in a racist society.

Black Americans do not share the eagerness of policy-makers to have their children bused from familiar, friendly, supportive environments into what often can be an unfriendly and hostile environment.

Black Americans are more interested in good sound basic education than they are in the need to balance themselves racially with others.

Black parents are as concerned as white parents about matters pertaining to what their children are taught, how well they are taught, where they go to school, and how they get to school.

Black Americans are seeking more than a re-examination of the educational process and reorientation of the social values that undergird that process, they are seeking to restructure the racial composition of the base of power that dictates and regulates those educational policies and programs which affect them.

Education of Black Americans

It is not the addition of white students to a previously all black school or of black students to a previously all white school that makes the difference; it is the elimination of many of the negative factors which impede growth and development.

The contention that black children can only receive or can best receive a quality education in predominantly white schools or a majority white classroom is blatantly racist and paternalistic.

Quality education has to do with the products of those schools whose policies, programs, and practices contribute significantly to the intellectual, psychological, and physical preparation of individuals for effective and satisfying participation in the society.

Until such time as institutional racism is eradicated and its effects rectified, it will cost more to educate black students than white students.

The range of abilities within any school is tremendous, and the wider the range is the greater the demand on the skills of school personnel and the higher the cost of education.

The integrity and viability of this democratic, pluralistic society depend, in large measure, on the effectiveness of its schools as agents of social consciousness and reform.

The priorities in terms of programs and services should be aimed at alleviating situations where socioeconomic factors combine to present the most urgent and demanding challenges to public education.

Integration/Desegregation

Integration is pluralism rather than assimilation, based on respect for differences rather than a desire for amalgamation.

Genuine integration is a reciprocal process in which blacks and whites gravitate toward each other, sharing decision-making control over institutions and communities and melding their ethical and esthetic values.

Desegregation becomes integration when culturally or racially diverse groups relate to each other as status equals.

Desegregation offers no guarantee of a quality education for black students; equal access is not the sufficient condition of equal educational opportunity.

When courts assign black students to achieve racially balanced schools whether or not their parents approve of the reassignment, they exert under the "rubric or remedy that character of racial dominance that was the essential evil of the separate but equal era."

Inherent in racial balance remedies that give priority to the placement of black students in a perpetual minority relationship with white students are the false assumptions that black children inevitably suffer intellectually when their education occurs in all black or mainly black schools and that the motivation and achievement of black students necessarily improves when they are enrolled in majority-white schools.

The rigid adherence to racial balance remedies that ignore the diversity among cities, deprecate "blackness," impose inequitable burdens on black students and their parents, give scant attention to the educational essentials of equal educational opportunity, ignore the importance of black history and culture, and/or deny black parents some choice is not only non-productive but a denial of equal educational opportunity.

Any argument that racial balance is a constitutional requirement suggests the legitimizations of inferior status for black Americans.

vd
9/84